

*Theological 89.*

*The invaluable Blessings of our Religious and Civil Government.*

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A  
SERMON,  
PREACHED IN THE  
PARISH CHURCH OF CHARLES,  
PLYMOUTH,  
ON THE  
FESTIVAL OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST,  
DECEMBER 27, 1792,  
BEFORE THE LODGE OF UNITY,  
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THE ANTIENT AND HONORABLE SOCIETY  
OF  
FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS,  
RESIDENT IN  
PLYMOUTH, PLYMOUTH-DOCK, and TAVISTOCK,  
BY  
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Preparing for the Press, and will be published with all possible expedition, a **LETTER** from Dr. **HAWKER** to Mr. **PORTER**, in answer to his defence of **UNITARIANISM**.

The second edition of Dr. **HAWKER**'s **SERMONS**, on the **DIVINITY** of **CHRIST**, is now printing, and will appear early in the spring.



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XXIV. PROVERBS, 21.

*My Son, fear thou the Lord and the King, and  
meddle not with them that are given to change.*

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**T**HE great pillars of a nation's happiness and prosperity, are true religion and good government. Without these, it is impossible, that it can long exist; for permanent happiness and prosperity can rest upon no other basis.

In religion, or *the fear of the Lord* (as the text expresses it) we adopt the only means that can effectually ensure the divine blessing, and make provision at the same time for the conscientious discharge of those duties which intimately affect the welfare of Society; but which lie beyond the reach of human laws to enforce. And the numerous claims and reciprocal obligations, which arise out of social life, can only be guaranteed by a faithful

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ful obedience to those necessary rules of order which in the language of the text is called *the fear of the King*. It is evident in the very nature of things, that this is the only system from which any community of people can promise themselves a continuance of the blessings of society. For those two great principles, extending to all the relative situations in which man stands to man in his present state; not only regulating his outward actions, but also operating upon his inward motives; purifying his heart and influencing his conduct; establish a foundation which nothing less comprehensive can accomplish, on which the edifice of happiness may be permanently constructed.

This is a fact so plain and palpable, that nothing but the blindest prejudice can obscure it. For let any man figure to himself the most perfect State of human felicity that the power of fancy can conceive; what would be the characters which composed it? Would they not be men of religion and virtue; men of integrity and honor; of justice, truth, and probity? The pious parent, the conscientious



conscientious magistrate, the obedient subject, the good man ! In short, *a City whose people were all righteous :\** where *mercy and truth met together ; righteousness and peace kissed each other : †* Where every individual, in his relative department, was endeavouring to promote his Neighbour's happiness, by the discharge of those duties which could alone ensure his own. Where all had learnt and all equally practised that luminous and comprehensive precept of the Apostle, *to honor all men, love the brotherhood, to fear God, and honor the King. ‡*

In the contemplation of such a picture of society, the mind kindles with the glow of affection, from the consciousness of the powers we still possess, through the benignity of heaven, for the promotion of general good, notwithstanding our present fallen and imperfect state. And though it must be confessed, that this view of human felicity, is rather the result of what *would* follow a due attention to religious and civil duties,

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\* Isaiah 60. 21.—† Psalm 85. 10.—‡ I Peter 2. 17.

than what is actually found in the world; yet the argument for the truth itself is not in the smallest degree diminished by the real state of things. It is sufficient to the purpose to prove, that true religion and good government, do in themselves lead to those blessings: the perversity or corruption of human nature, in slighting the means, or not observing them closely, neither render the principles themselves precarious nor are they justly chargeable with the consequences. Effects are always correspondent to their causes. Wherever the most eminent examples of religion and virtue are found; there you may infallibly conclude the existence of the most eminent degrees of happiness.

Admitting this reasoning to be well founded (which cannot, I think, with the least plausibility of argument be denied) where ought we to look for the highest instances of human felicity, but to this very country to which through the bounty of providence we belong?

*The fear of the Lord and the King*; that is in other words, True religion and sound government

government form that glorious constitution which is at once the praise and envy of all the earth. And we may credit the opinion of foreign writers, who from natural prejudices, connected with their national characters, cannot be supposed to be influenced by any partiality in our favor; they have all concurred in giving their decided approbation to our system of government; and have extolled the English constitution in the loftiest terms of the most unbounded panegyric.

Were I to say, that our present establishment, both in Church and State, possesses all the powers, the ability, the vigor, the energy; in short every requisite to make a people virtuous and by consequence happy; I should scarcely overcharge the picture of our religious and civil liberties. To pronounce a full and just eulogium on the English constitution, it would be necessary to take a comparative view of it with other states, in order to define with proper precision its vast superiority; and by a delineation of its most prominent features, display the peculiar qualities it possesses, to answer all  
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the wants of society in general, and of individuals in particular, (as far as human policy can reach) in providing for the peace and tranquillity of this life, and (through the merits of the great Saviour of the world) for all the happiness of another.

Will it be said that these effects do not always follow; that our nation affords not constant evidences of this truth. The fact is allowed, but the reason though humiliating is easily to be assigned.

For if the sacred and venerable principles of religion be slighted; if the regular and faithful administration of justice be impeded; if the fear of God be banished from the mind; and an obedience to secular authority be dismissed along with it: Can it become the object of surprize, that the consequences which we are taught to expect from a steady and uninterrupted attention to those great principles of conduct are perverted? It would indeed be matter of astonishment, if such causes did not produce their corresponding effects.

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Amidst the infinite diversity which appears in the operations of God, in the government of the universe, there is one great object of the divine mind, which we can clearly trace uniformly carried on, the leading marks of which are strikingly visible; it is the connection by which God has inseparably united our happiness with our duty, so that the violation of the one, sooner or later becomes certainly fatal to the other. Hence, therefore, if our felicity as a people does not keep pace with our advantages as men; it is because we break the chain of order; we violate the claims of duty; and in our disobedience or neglect of the means of happiness, the cause of every national or private evil, may for the most part be traced to its proper source.

I hope I have fully prepared your minds by these prefatory observations for perceiving both the great importance of the doctrine in the text, and the infinite consequences as a duty deducible from it. For if the happiness and prosperity of a people become so intimately blended with a conscientious regard

gard to the principles of true religion and good government; the maxim contained in it will appear full of the highest wisdom and deserving our closest regard. *My Son fear thou the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change.*

In pursuing the train of reasoning which this passage of Scripture furnishes, I solicit your attention to the discussion of the following particulars.

The former part of the precept in the text is, *the fear of the Lord*: Under this comprehensive expression which evidently includes the whole of religion, I shall first point out the obligation to this duty, from briefly representing the blessings we enjoy in the quiet possession of that reformed Church which is the established religion of this Country. When I have finished this part of the subject (which on every account is intitled to pre-eminence) it will not, I hope, be considered as infringing the sanctity of this place, if in explaining the second clause of the text, *the fear of the King*, as  
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it is expressed, which may be supposed to refer to the measures of civil government ; I point out to your notice some of the invaluable privileges we enjoy as a people under the mild and equitable administration of justice which distinguishes our land.

From the united consideration of these particulars, I am persuaded, that sufficient arguments will arise to enforce, under the divine blessing, a steady regard and obedience to both those principles of duty ; the *fear of the Lord and the King*, that we may be in no danger of falling into that error alluded to in the conclusion of the text, *of meddling with them that are given to change*.

Under the first particular, of the obligation to *the fear of the Lord*, from the happiness we enjoy in the quiet possession of our reformed Church ; it will be hardly necessary, in order to awaken a due attention to the value of this great blessing, to lead your thoughts back to those ages of intellectual darkness, in which the clouds of bigotry had well nigh covered the Christian world, and brought on

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that night of error and superstition, which nothing but the radiance of divine grace could have dispelled.

You well know, that before the glorious light of the reformation dawned upon this land, the pure faith of the gospel was lost, amidst the rubbish of legendary tales and fabulous histories. The Sacred Scriptures were perverted to countenance the most absurd and impious worship; and the great doctrines which distinguish the religion of Jesus, as a system of salvation to a fallen race of beings, had given way to every notion folly could suggest or fancy invent.

Ignorance and Superstition reigned with united and uncontrouled power. And the sound doctrine which Christ and his apostles had taught, being once contaminated, there appeared to be no end to the growing corruption. One departure from the purity and simplicity of the faith, became but the prelude to another, until the whole formed a mass of absurdities scarcely credible. The adoration of relics and images; prayers ad-  
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dressed to departed saints and martyrs ; the  
 absolution of sins purchasable for money ;  
 these were among the least exceptionable  
 parts of the Romish ritual. The fire of  
 purgatory, and masses for the dead, together  
 with a train of innumerable mediators, form-  
 ed from any character of real or supposed  
 superior virtue, supplied the place of that  
 great and only Intercessor which Scripture  
 had appointed between God and Man, the  
 Lord Jesus Christ.

Such, and far worse, if it be possible, was  
 the state of Christian faith, when the great  
 Reformers of our country, supported by the  
 arm of Omnipotence, undertook the arduous  
 task of removing from the gospel, all that  
 heap of superstition which the corruption or  
 ignorance of mankind had thrown upon it,  
 and bringing it forth to the notice of the  
 world, in its own lovely and engaging form  
 of apostolic purity.

The idle and unmeaning ceremonies which  
 folly had engrafted upon it were taken away,  
 and the plain and simple services which were  
 substituted



substituted in their place, were such only as might best lead the heart to the adoration of Him whose worship, when pure, must be *in spirit and in truth*.

It would be gratifying, no doubt, to trace the steps of those pious servants of the Lord, in this their great undertaking. From the interest we bear in their labors of love, we could not but enter with a proportionate pleasure into every occurrence of their history, from whose services we derive such unspeakable advantages. But it will be more to our present purpose, to consider the great object for which they labored. To see how well suited to all the important ends of redemption, that form of worship is, which, thro' the blessing of God, we at this hour enjoy from their instrumentality.

It would ill become a Minister of the establishment to endeavour to aggrandize the Church to which he belongs, by blowing the trumpet of her fame. Indeed it is unnecessary. The services of our Liturgy are confessedly allowed to comprize all the leading

ing principles of our holy religion. The great articles, both in faith and doctrine, which are professed in the church of England, are immediately taken from the Scriptures themselves, and derive all their influence from that supreme authority.

And though we dare not, we wish not indeed, to confine the purity of christian worship within the walls of our church ; yet with becoming modesty we venture to assert, that both in doctrine, and in discipline, we admit of none superior. Every thing necessary to salvation is taught among us, and enforced with a warmth and earnestness of persuasion suitable to its infinite importance. The great duties of faith and repentance ; the regeneration or change of the heart : the necessity of the divine operations of the holy spirit on the mind of man ; pardon to the sins of our nature through the sole merits and atonement of the great Author of our religion ; and his divine mediation as the only channel by which we can approach God in all the acts of worship ; as these are among the first principles of the gospel of Christ, they form  
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the leading articles of our creed, and become more eminently distinguished in all the parts of our church services.

But though the profession of these doctrines, which, from their importance, we cannot but consider as indispensable to salvation, induce our recommendation of them to our people with proportioned solicitude; yet the mildness of our church government lays no restraint upon the consciences of men. We use no rigor, but persuasion; nothing compulsive, but entreaty. As no man is, or can be, answerable to any but his Maker, for his religious opinions; so every one in this land of freedom, is permitted to enjoy his opinions unmolested. He may conform to whatever mode of worship he thinks proper, provided he do nothing subversive of the sentiments and practice of others. His separation from the establishment becomes not in the least offensive, or subjects him to the smallest reprehension.

The Toleration act is a happy provision of indemnity for this purpose, by which our  
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Dissenting Brethren possess that just and undoubted right, which belongs to them as christians, and as men, of serving God according to their own consciences. A right, which no real friend to religion, or good government, would wish to break in upon; which it must be confessed, is equal to all their wants; and if religion be the only object for which they dissent from us, no greater extension of privileges can be desired, for no laws that can be framed, (unless the national establishment itself were done away,) could admit of a greater freedom of worship than they at present possess.

Such are the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England! and if the duties to which it leads were made the ruling principle of every man's conduct; if the nation at large were impelled by such motives, what happy consequences must follow! we should then behold every thing that is lovely and amiable in human nature. The golden age which the fiction of the Poets describe, would be indeed realized. According to the figurative language of the Prophet, *Then would judgment*

*ment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.\**

Together with the beauty of holiness prevailing through the land, every principle of moral goodness and virtue would influence our people. The necessity of human laws would be at once superseded; the fence of property might be removed; the ministers of justice would lose their office; nay the very sanctions of authority would be done away. For what should the sword of vengeance be unsheathed, when there remained no more offenders to receive punishment? If mankind were but fully sensible of the invaluable effects arising from a strict obedience to the Gospel; if that spirit of grace which is held forth to all that seek it, were made the invariable principle of regulating the conduct, what a happy nation should we be!

With what fervency ought we to pray to God to give us this spirit! That he would graciously hasten that day, that glorious day promised in Scripture, when *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with*

\* Amos v. 24.

*with the kid. When they shall no longer hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, but the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.\**

But until these desirable events are accomplished, it becomes necessary to add the laws of human authority, to the sanction of the divine precepts of religion. This leads to the consideration of the second branch of the argument proposed in the text, to point out to your notice, the great excellence of that political form of government, which distinguishes the constitution of this country, which is in alliance with the Church, and derives, from that connection, all the energy that can be needful for the welfare of our people.

This is a subject, which, if pursued thro' all the parts by which it might be exemplified, would lead far beyond the limits to which I am necessarily restricted, but which would amply prove the excellence and wisdom of the British Constitution.

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\* Isaiah xi, 6—9.



It is only by comparative views, with the police of other states, (as I before observed) that we can form a just and adequate conception of the importance of our own. There is, indeed, another method by which it might be estimated; and that is by its loss. A deprivation of the blessings we now, perhaps, insensibly enjoy, would feelingly convince us of their value. But God grant that we may never learn their consequence by such painful instruction!

Without descending to particulars, in proof of the argument, (for the time would be insufficient for this purpose) suffer me to ask, to what nation shall we go for examples, where the person of the people is so sacred, where the property of the subject is held so inviolable, or where the administration of the laws, through all its departments, is conducted with that uniform regard to strict justice and impartiality, as under our present happy government? The right of trial by Juries; the power of expressing, in the most unreserved manner, our sentiments publicly upon all subjects, civil and religious; in short,

short, every freedom which tends not to the subversion of order, and every liberty which is not made the cloak of licentiousness, are the characteristics and the privileges of Englishmen.

I am confident, that every one who hears me, must be so perfectly sensible of these great truths, that it becomes altogether superfluous, to point them out, the objects of your attention. You know full well, that if your person be threatened, or your property be in danger, the law is always open to afford the most ample security to the one, and to protect the other. And the administration of justice is carried on, by principles so fair and impartial, that in the decisions of it, all party, prejudice, friendship, resentment, and even pity itself, are laid aside, that no passion may preponderate in the scale, but be held forth with an equal hand to all. The Prince and the Beggar here are upon a level, and the Servant is as great as his Master.\*

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\* It was a beautiful idea, which gave rise to those paintings in our antient Courts of Judicature, where Justice

These are blessings soon mentioned, but their effects deserve a long and frequent consideration. Consult the legislatures of other countries, and see whether any thing similar can be found among them. And conceive what a happy constitution of government must that be, taken altogether, where such are the leading principles, on which the whole system is founded.

It is in the freedom and security we enjoy, that the common blessings of Providence find time to operate upon the mind, in awakening all the returns from Man to his Creator. The homeliest meal, and in the poorest station, is a thousand times more valuable than the most luxurious repast, if in continual danger of being snatched from us, by the hand of violence and rapine. And what peace, what self enjoyment, what disposition either to the service

is portrayed as blind; to imply that no surrounding objects were suffered to warp her judgment from a steady and inflexible adherence to truth. The thought was borrowed most probably from the divine legation of Moses, which prohibited gifts from blinding the eyes of the Judges, and commanded that no countenance should be given even to a poor man in his cause. Exod. xxiii. 3. 6.—Deut. xvi. 19.



service of God or man, can he feel, let his rank in life be what it may, who lives under the constant apprehension of danger, in a country where suspicion is sufficient to condemn, and where punishment often precedes trial.

If we want proofs of the existence of such a calamitous state, the recent example of a neighbouring kingdom, furnishes the most woeful instances of the kind. Your own ideas will best picture to you, the melancholy situation of that unhappy country, which is the wretched victim of anarchy and confusion! Even at the very moment that I am speaking, how many worthy souls are experiencing in it, the sad effects of the late convulsions? How many already have fallen a sacrifice to the madness of an ungoverned and outrageous people! And how many more, while the ebullition of phrenzy remains, God only knows, there may be reserved to the same or greater trials!

When we consider their distracted state, the heart must be callous indeed, which rises  
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not into sentiments of the most lively gratitude to the great disposer of all events, who has graciously appointed our lot in this land of liberty.

We now stand as upon a peaceful shore, and behold the storm and tempest afar off. The waves which agitate that kingdom reach not to us. Their contentions and their tumults are like the noise of a distant multitude, in whose clamours we have no immediate concern. And though as christians and as men, we cannot but feel the most painful sensibility for a nation, torn as it is by such intestine divisions; yet it serves at the same time to remind us of our own felicity, and to make our security doubly grateful, while we sit down in peace, *every man under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree*. And surely, the consciousness of this may well make every individual prize the invaluable blessings the bounty of heaven has afforded him, and study to preserve them with the most anxious solicitude. If this plant of civil and religious freedom be of English growth, and peculiar to this soil; and through the fostering care  
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of our forefathers, has waxed to an high tree, under whose spreading branches, the people for ages have been sheltered, and on whose choicest fruits they have fed; shall we suffer it now to be dug up by the roots, or cut down and destroyed? Shall we not rather watch over it, and fence it round, and guard it from the ravages of every foe? And above all, pray to God, that the sun, and the rain, and the dew of heaven, may shed their kindest influence upon it, fertilize and make it flourish more and more?

To speak without a figure. It is certainly our duty, and our highest interest, to support that happy constitution to which we belong. To make all private opinion, and private considerations, bend before it; that we may transmit it, free and undiminished, in all its privileges, to our children and our childrens children, to the latest generations.

If I have not in some measure anticipated, what I proposed to offer in conclusion, on the latter part of the text, I may safely leave it to your own reflections, to draw the inference.



ence. For if *the fear of the Lord and the King* be the foundation of national happiness and prosperity ; and if the laws of this land have made every provision human wisdom can devise, for the security of both ; the precept in the text will be the precept of common sense and common policy, with every man who is endued with the least consideration ; *meddle not with them that are given to change*. For what shall we change ? What equivalent can be held forth to us by way of barter, to compensate for such mighty blessings ? Shall we listen to the visionary schemes of speculative or designing men, and substitute the wild chimera of the imagination, in the place of sound policy and good government ? Shall we throw down this goodly fabric, which exercised the united wisdom and labor of our ancestors to rear, and begin again to build a new system of laws, which caprice or fancy, or worse motives than either, may give birth to ?

Upon the supposition indeed, that there existed any cause for an alteration ; if the regular administration of justice, in any of its departments

departments was violated; or if the laws themselves were found incompetent to all the purposes of good government; or if power in any of the ministers of the state, was exercised in an undue manner, to the prevention of a just and impartial course of equity; then I confess it would be the duty of every true patriot, to seek, by every lawful means, the removal of the evil, and restore to the constitution its original energy and vigor. But how far is this from being the case at present? Has the supreme magistrate of the nation, either in his own person, or by his servants, violated or perverted the cause of justice, in any of the courts of law? Has he encroached upon the liberty of the subject, or assumed an undue authority, to the injury of the people? You know he has not. So much the reverse, indeed, that by one particular act of his reign, *in making the Judges independent*, he hath abridged his own authority, and taken the most effectual method of manifesting his attention to the happiness of his subjects. And when we see united in his character, all the virtues of private life, the good husband, the good father,

the pious man ; these great qualities are the truest pledge for our confidence in the fidelity of the supreme Magistrate.

Through the grace of God, he has now reigned over these kingdoms, for more than thirty years, beloved and honored, and revered, by all ranks and degrees of our people. And now as he advances in life, and of consequence becomes the more endeared to his subjects affection, surely the evening of his day should be distinguished by a peaceable submission to his authority, and by proper conformity to the laws of the constitution, in the observance of which, his happiness, and his peoples, are inseparably blended.

Away then with those mistaken notions of evils which exist not, unless in the heated imagination of a few misguided individuals. Let us cautiously avoid being led away by those false lights, which if followed, conduct only into dangerous paths, that terminate in darkness. Let us rather adhere to the maxim of the text. *To fear the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change.*  
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We are certainly a nation highly favored of the divine goodness. The Gospel of Christ hath shone upon this land, with a brightness unequalled among other people. In temporal blessings also, the bounty of heaven hath been poured forth with the same liberal hand. Even our national afflictions have carried with them the marks of tenderness and compassion. The united power of Europe, which was exerted against us during the last war, was not suffered to hurt. England, emerged with triumph, from that unequal contest, thro' the divine aid, and is at this moment making rapid advances to the highest rank, in the scale of nations. And shall we be tempted to forego these advantages, by attending to the false reasonings of mistaken men? What a melancholy consideration would it be, if after having exerted sufficient fortitude, to bear up against all our foreign enemies, England should fall a sacrifice to the clamor of her professed friends?

This would be similar to the fate of antient Rome. It was the factions and vices of the Romans themselves, which hastened the evening

ing of that great empire. For when she had vanquished all who openly opposed her arms, she herself became a prey to the ill conduct of her own people. And it requires not the spirit of prophecy to foresee, that if the Providence of God permits the fall of this country, our own unhappy divisions and animosities, will be principally instrumental in the accomplishment of the dreadful event.

That the divine mercy may avert from us this visitation, our most earnest endeavours ought to be called forth. Let us unite our cordial wishes, and our noblest efforts; and oh! that all parties would, at least in this, consolidate their strength, to defeat either the open or insidious attempts of *all that have evil will at Zion*. Blessed as we are in the free and unrestrained exercise of our holy faith; happy in our government; happy in our climate; and in every sense favored by God, beyond every other nation under heaven; let us but endeavor to recommend ourselves the deserving objects of his mercies, and we may reasonably promise their continuance to ourselves and our posterity for ever.

Arise

Arise then, I beseech you, and looking up to him *by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree justice,\** with one voice of animated devotion, let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem, that all may prosper that love thee, that peace may be within our walls, and plenteousness within our palaces; ‡ that there may be no leading into captivity, no complaining in our streets; happy are the people that are in such a case; yea blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God. †

\* Prov. 8. 15.—‡ Ps. 122. 67.—† Ps. 144. 14. 15.





